

## **An open letter to First Minister John Swinney for reducing child poverty in Scotland.**

Dear John Swinney,

This Challenge Poverty Week, the Girlguiding Scotland Reach Young Advisors – a group of young members involved in the Generation CashBack project – are writing to you to demand action to reduce child poverty, and its impact, in Scotland.

Girlguiding's research shows that the cost-of-living crisis and job security is a huge worry for many girls both in and out of guiding.

- 62% of 11-21 year olds are worried about not being able to afford their bills
- 55% of girls aged 11-21 worry about getting a job in the future
- 54% of 11-21 year olds are worried about AI taking away their jobs

At Girlguiding Scotland we're proud to have been part of the successful campaign to end period poverty in Scotland. Adding our voice alongside those of other amazing organisations doing great work in this area. In 2020 the Free Period Products Bill became law in Scotland, placing a legal duty on local authorities to ensure that period products are available for free to anyone who needs them.

While this was a great step forward, Girlguiding Scotland wants to see an end to child poverty. We believe it's important to talk openly about the effects of poverty and challenge the stigma around it. We believe all families should have the resources they need and an income through work and/or benefits that means no child grows up in poverty.

Poverty in Scotland is causing children to have poor mental health and worry about their futures. 25% of girls (aged 11-21) say their mental health is negatively affected by worrying about money (Girls' Attitudes Survey 2025, Girlguiding). From our lived experience, it causes children to miss school as they can't afford transport, lunch or uniform, or because they feel anxious about being judged by their peers due to living in poverty. Families are having to go without things such as food as they can't afford it, and the cost of energy bills has a major effect on health and wellbeing. Poverty in Scotland is causing an increase in crime and drinking rates, which means that Scotland is a less enjoyable place to grow up.

As Girlguiding Scotland young members, we want to see a Scotland where no one's health or wellbeing is impacted by poverty.

Along with other organisations campaigning in this area, we want our voices to be heard in the fight against child poverty. We are calling on you and the government to:

- Enable everyone to be able to attend school, through free school transport and lunches, and affordable uniform for all ages.
- Continue the 'Young Persons' (Under 22s) Free Bus Travel Scheme' until young people turn 26 and include all forms of public transport.
- Reduce energy bills and increase the availability of energy grants.
- Raise the minimum wage for under 18-year-olds to align with the minimum age for over 18-year-olds.
- Create more job opportunities for young people that don't require formal qualifications.
- Invest in youth work and youth programmes to give young people more positive, safe spaces to socialise.
- Increase funding and resources for community spaces.
- Create free access to exercise facilities to improve everyone's physical and mental health.
- Fund access to free fruit and veg and incentivise workplaces to provide free healthy meals.

As women and girls are disproportionately impacted due to preexisting inequalities ([Poverty Alliance, 2024](#)), we would be pleased to meet with you to discuss this important issue and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Girlguiding Scotland's Reach Young Advisors. \*



\*The Scottish Government funded Generation CashBack project supports girls from areas of deprivation across Scotland to access guiding, try new things, develop their leadership skills and contribute to their communities. The Reach young advisors are 4 young people from Generation CashBack supported units who worked together to create a fun filled event for 150 young people from other CashBack groups. Through this they built their confidence, event and decision making skills, and learnt to share their opinions about what they believe in.